

November 5, 1999

Jeff Ottesen, Statewide Planning Chief
Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska 998 11

Subject: DOT&PF's Southwest Alaska Regional Transportation Plan

Dear Jeff:

We are writing to express our interest and concerns about the DOT&PF's Southwest Alaska Regional Transportation Plan ("SWARTP"). We have reviewed the "Description of Alternatives - Technical Memorandum (Aug. '99). Based on this review, it is clear to us that much remains to be done to understand and respond to Bristol Bay's regional transportation needs.

In Bristol Bay's case, the SWARTP's participation process simply has not succeeded. By relying on the Southwest Alaska Municipal Corporation (SWAMC) meetings outside the region for public input, you have over-looked the west side of Bristol Bay. There are 29 villages in Bristol Bay, and you were successful in connecting with the 20 villages which are incorporated into two organized boroughs: the Lake & Peninsula and the Bristol Bay boroughs. However, you almost totally missed the remaining 9 Bristol Bay villages--the "Left-Out 9."

Four of the five most-populated Bristol Bay villages are included in the Left-Out 9: Dillingham, Manokotak, New Stuyahok, and Togiak. Of the 7,700 permanent residents in Bristol Bay, these four villages alone account for over half (4,000) of Bristol Bay's entire population. The remaining 5 villages of the Left-Out 9 account for another 700 Bristol Bay residents, meaning that over 61% of the Bristol Bay residents have not been adequately consulted in a process that will impact them for the next 20 years.

Many key Bristol Bay organizations are also virtually unaware of the status of the regional plan, much less that the plan is nearing completion. For example, there have been no formal contacts with the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC), which owns 3 million acres of subsurface rights in the region. We've contacted many Bristol Bay organizations over the last few weeks to discuss the SWARTP. The City of Dillingham's experience relative to the SWARTP is typical of many organizations in Bristol Bay: the City was aware that the project was launched several years ago, but it has had no meaningful contact with the process since then.

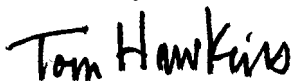
To remedy the situation, we are asking you for two sets of actions:

- (1) Improvethethe Participation Process. Set up a process that will actively involve all local interests in the planning project. We would be happy to provide you with a list of regional contacts. The “cc” list at the end of this letter is a good start. This renewed participative effort might culminate in a presentation by the DOT&PF of a set of revised alternatives at BBNC’s annual Village Leadership Workshop meeting this December 6th and 7th here in Anchorage. We typically receive 150 council (both city and village) and corporate leaders from most of Bristol Bay’s 29 villages. Prior to your presentation, however, sufficient work with Bristol Bay interests must be completed to develop a set of better transportation alternatives (see below); and
- (2) Revisit the Alternatives. With few exceptions, the roads and ferry alternatives currently identified in the plan are unlikely to be implemented. Hundred-plus million dollar road projects linking sparsely-populated rural communities were not ever seriously considered for construction--even during the era of bountiful state capital budgets. But if you include a system like this, you should also look at all of the possible village inter-connections. Ideally, we would like to see a set of realistic regional transportation projects that actually stand a chance of getting built, such as those focused on the options below:
 - Roads and road improvements in the vicinity of existing communities. These roads would meet two criteria: (1) they would be important to regional economic health (e.g., road links between a town and its airport or solid-waste landfill); and (2) they could eventually be used as sections of a more extensive regional road system (such as those identified in the SWARTP’s current list of alternatives on the east side);
 - Improvements to airports, including the addition of cross-wind runways, runway extensions to accommodate larger aircraft, and terminal enhancements. Our regional health organization would like to see 5,000-foot runways accessible from every community, which would cut precious time off medi-vats to Anchorage. Achieving this might require a combination of airport enhancements and road links;
 - Inter-village roads construction, several of which are identified in the current alternatives. We propose that more alternatives be considered, particularly in the Left-Out 9 villages on the west side of Bristol Bay; and
 - Partnerships with other road-building organizations. The BIA, PHS, and the DEC’s Village Safe Water program are currently building the most new roads in the Bristol Bay region, and often at a higher incremental cost than might be incurred by the State. More work is needed to coordinate these projects with State projects.

After these new options are developed, the DOT&PF should work with Bristol Bay interests to prioritize the alternatives by considering the costs and the regional benefits of each alternative. This last, critical step is conspicuously absent from the current process.

We, in the Bristol Bay region, do not want to be at the wrong end of the State's transportation priorities-funding list for the next fifth of a century. To avoid that scenario, we believe a new set of alternatives is needed. These alternatives would focus on regional projects that stand a better chance of being constructed, thereby providing tangible benefits to many Bristol Bay residents. Neither the current set of alternatives, nor the current process are headed in that direction. We look forward to working with you to develop a plan that works for Bristol Bay.

Sincerely,



Tom Hawkins

Sr. Vice-President & Chief Operating Officer

cc-list:

Gov. Tony Knowles	Iliamna Natives, Ltd.	Igiugig Village Council
Sen. Lyman Hoffman	Kijik Corporation	Iliamna Village Council
Rep. Carl Moses	Koliganek Natives, Ltd.	Ivanof Bay Village Council
Rep. Mary Kapsner	Levelock Natives, Ltd.	Kokhanok Village Council
Chris Hladic, City of Dillingham	Manokotak Natives, Ltd.	Koliganek Village Council
Walt Wrede, L & P Borough	Oceanside Corporation	Levelock Village Council
Jeff Courier, B. Bay Borough	Olsonville, Inc.	Manokotak Village Council
Moses Kritz, City of Togiak	Paug-Vik, Inc.	Naknek Village Council
Judi Nelson, BBEDC	Pedro Bay Native Cot-p	New Stuyahok Vill. Council
Dave McClure, BBHA	Pilot Point Native Corp.	Newhalen Village Council
Robert Clark, BBAHC	Saguyak, Inc.	Nondalton Village Council
Dugan Nielsen, BBNA	Stuyahok, Ltd.	Pedro Bay Village Council
Alaska Peninsula Corp.	Togiak Natives, Ltd.	Perryville Village Council
Aleknagik Natives, Ltd.	Twin Hills Native Corp.	Pilot Point Village Council
Bay View, Inc.	Aleknagik Vill. Council	Port Heiden Village Council
Becharof Corporation	Chignik Village Council	South Naknek Village Council
Chignik Lagoon Native Corp.	Chignik Lag. Vill. Council	Togiak Traditional Council
Chignik River, Ltd.	Chignik Lake V. Council	Twin Hills Traditional Council
Choggiung, Ltd.	Clark Pt. Village Council	Ugashik Village Council
Ekwox Natives, Ltd.	Curyung Tribal Council	
Far West, Inc.	Egegik Village Council	
Igiugig Natives, Ltd.	Ekwox Village Council	